

[Lil Shaw]

Accession no.

W 3623

Date received

10/10/40

Consignment no.

1

Wash. Office

Label

Amount

4p

WPA L. C. PROJECT Writers' UNIT

Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title American lives Packinghouse workers

Place of origin Chicago, Illinois Date 5/12/39

Project worker Betty Burke

Project editor

Library of Congress

Remarks

W3623

Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A

Circumstances of Interview

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

STATE

NAME OF WORKER Betty Burke

ADDRESS 1339 S. Troy

DATE May 12, 1939

SUBJECT American Lives Packinghouse worker

1. Date and time of interview May 12, 10 a.m.
2. Place of interview 5529 S. Hermitage - home 2nd fl.
3. Name and address of informant Lil Shaw 5529 S. Hermitage
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. None
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

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None

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Ordinary 2 flat apt. building, in somewhat well-to-do neighborhood, scanty, nondescript furnishings in home, keeps a boarder to help pay the rent. Couple of streets away to the north are the 'yard' slums.

FORM B

Personal History of Informant

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

STATE

NAME OF WORKER Betty Burke

ADDRESS 1339 S. Troy

DATE May 12, 1939

SUBJECT Packinghouse worker

NAME OF INFORMANT Lil Shaw

1. Ancestry Irish, American born
2. Place and date of birth New York City, About 25 years old
3. Family Husband, 5 month old baby

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4. Places lived in, with dates New York, Chicago
5. Education, with dates Finished Grammar school
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates
7. Special skills and interests Packinghouse union, progressive community groups, and political pressure groups to supply aid to the workingman are her main interests.
8. Community and religious activities No religious affiliations
9. Description of informant A hundred and seventy-five pounds of husky Irish, fresh, cocky manner, pretty face, hard worker, keeps busy in various groups above mentioned practically every night.
10. Other Points gained in interview

FORM C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

STATE

NAME OF WORKER Betty Burke

ADDRESS 1339 S. Troy

DATE May 12, 1939

Library of Congress

SUBJECT Packinghouse worker

NAME OF INFORMANT Lil Shaw

I'll start with my first job in the yards, pork trimming in Swift's. That job is in a cooler where there are no windows. It's always wet and the girls had to wear boots, or wooden shoes, and woolen socks, and long aprons. It's a messy job and the girls would get all bloody and wet and greasy right away. We had to change aprons at least twice a week and the company doesn't furnish them or launder them for us.

Pork trimming consists of trimming fat pork from the lean. All that's done with a knife, which you have to keep sharpening all the time because of the wetness and then the work naturally dulls your knife soon. It's very cold, and your hands get frozen and numbed and since it's piece work you have to work like mad to make anything. Hundreds of girls have their fingers all cut up on account of the rush. They're always sticking each other or themselves, accidentally, of course, knives slip out of their fingers, they get so cold, or greasy and bloody, or else because they're trying to make the above B rate. That's base rate. You had to earn bonus, and go over base rate. If you don't, they fire you.

The pork, before it's trimmed, comes in barrels of 60 pounds or more, and we'd have to carry our barrels of meat up to the tables ourselves. The barrel itself weighs about twenty pounds. That'd be some work, and don't forget we didn't get paid for lugging them, either, we only got paid for the meat we trimmed and had weighed. Another thing, we used

FORM D

Extra Comment

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

Library of Congress

STATE

NAME OF WORKER Betty Burke

ADDRESS 1339 S. Troy

DATE May 12, 1939

SUBJECT Packinghouse worker

NAME OF INFORMANT Lil Shaw

to have to come to work extra early in order to get any pails to work with. There weren't enough pails to go around and those who didn't have any couldn't do their work, they'd have to wait till somebody was finished with theirs, which usually never happened, because the girls hung on to their pails, being all piece workers they couldn't afford to sit around and wait, none of them. That made an awful lot of trouble. Everybody was always mad at everybody else, but it wasn't anybody's fault except the company's.

To go to lunch we had to climb two flights of stairs, the steep kind, like fire escapes. Many times there would be serious accidents, women would slip on them because they had on their rubber boots, or those wooden shoes, and break their ankles or their legs, just all kinds of accidents.

I got laid off there. The whole gang I was with, about 12 girls, got laid off. We couldn't make the rate, try as we would.